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Update on Executions in China

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During a recent interview with a West German newspaper, published on November 20, Premier Li Peng said that "fewer than 20 death sentences were passed" for crimes related to pro-democracy protests last spring and summer. Li said that he did not know the exact figure. He said that the death sentences "did not affect demonstrators, but those who were responsible for crimes such as brawls, destruction, looting, arson, and killings."

On November 8, a Wenzhou, Zhejiang court sentenced to death a private entrepreneur convicted of killing a tax collector during an October 29 fistfight that followed a dispute over tax assessments.

A Guangzhou policewoman and a male accomplice were executed on November 21 for receiving more than \$76,000 in bribes to allow rural residents illegally to transfer to urban areas between 1984 and 1988. The two were arrested in June 1988, and convicted in June 1989, but appealed to the Guangzhou Intermediate People's Court. Their appeal was rejected on November 6. The sentence was carried out the same day.

COMMENT: Li Peng's comment is consistent with published Chinese media accounts of executions for crimes related to civil unrest last spring and summer. His statement, however, is ambiguous and may refer only to executions in Beijing. About a dozen executions have been reported as taking place outside Beijing for crimes related to unrest in June. Rumors persist, however, that many secret executions took place in the weeks following the June 4 suppression of protest.

Moreover, since June numerous executions have taken place nationwide for crimes unrelated to the unrest. Between August 15 and late October, one press service documented at least 74 executions reported in national Chinese media; this total did not include unreported executions or those reported only in provincial or local newspapers.

The Wenzhou and Guangzhou cases demonstrate the highly variable speed with which justice is administered in China. The Wenzhou entrepreneur was caught, tried, and convicted, his (automatic) appeal rejected, and the execution carried out within less than two weeks. By contrast, in the Guangzhou case a year elapsed between arrest and conviction, and the appeal process alone took more than four months.

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